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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 002431

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/18/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KS](#)
SUBJECT: ROK PLANS AID TO AFGHANISTAN DESPITE MEDIA
COMPLICATIONS

Classified By: Joseph Y. Yun for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (C) Summary. In a December 18 meeting with A/DCM, MOFAT Director-General Chang Ho-jin requested that Washington and Seoul avoid public discussions of possible additional aid for Afghanistan. The ROK is considering a number of options, including deployment of military personnel and assets. However, to do this, the ROKG must carefully walk back from the previous Korean public understanding that the USG was not requesting "combat" assistance. Chang said that Washington had the misperception that the ROKG was putting off the decision. Not true, the ROKG is planning to deliver non-military aid soon, including USD 5 million in transportation equipment, and very senior ROKG officials were discussing possible military assistance. End Summary.

Media (Mis)Perception Matters

12. (C) A/DCM met with Chang Ho-jin, Director-General of the North American Affairs Bureau in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MOFAT) on December 18 to discuss ROK aid plans for Afghanistan. Chang said that the ROKG does have plans for additional aid to Afghanistan, but the ROKG does not want to have the discussion about those plans in the media. DG Chang said that a Department of Defense (DOD) press briefing in Washington after the recent SPI sparked ROK media interest because Korean correspondents interpreted the DOD as being disappointed with the ROKG on assistance to Afghanistan. It was also seen as USG pressure to get the ROKG to act. The potential negative political ramifications of being perceived as caving in to USG pressure are enormous. When ROKG officials claim not to know what the USG is seeking for Afghanistan, their intention is not to ignore the USG's request, but rather to deflect discussion of the issue in the press.

13. (C) The best way to package additional ROKG aid for Afghanistan, Chang said, is for the public to view the aid as necessary because the ROKG cares about the people and situation in Afghanistan, as opposed to coming from political pressure in Washington. From this perspective, the ROKG desires to funnel aid, whenever possible, through the Korea International Overseas Cooperation Agency (KOICA).

ROK Public is not Expecting Military Deployment

14. (C) Chang said the ROKG is also considering military assistance. However, the ROKG must act with extreme caution because the clear message from the August summit was that the USG was not asking for "combat" personnel or assets. The

ROKG must, therefore, carefully walk back from this position.

If the ROKG were to deploy military assets and personnel, such as ISR assets (mid-altitude UAVs), the National Assembly must approve. Right now, the Defense Minister and other "higher level" persons are reviewing these options. Chang denied that the public backlash from the death of two Korean missionaries held hostage by the Taliban in July 2007 was an important factor influencing ROKG's decisions.

But the ROK Will Send Aid Shortly

15. (C) Chang confirmed that the ROKG will provide additional aid to Afghanistan shortly. Once the parties determined the appropriate specs for the USD 5 million in transportation aid (motorcycles), Chang expected that the aid would be delivered "as soon as possible." Chang also confirmed that any civilian aid package funded from the current approved budget would not need National Assembly approval. However, both unfunded civilian aid packages and the deployment of military assets need National Assembly ratification.

STEPHENS